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ABSTRACT

This paper presents step-by-step guidelines for evaluating a reading course. A concept of evaluation is discussed as a guide to decision making for teachers in the ongoing development of an instructional program. A procedure for developing an evaluation plan for instructional reading programs is explained, specific questions are delineated that teachers must ask in the development of an evaluation plan, and a basic design is presented. Examples of results over a 3-year period of evaluating reading courses are reported. A 12-item bibliography is included. (Author/PD)

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EVALUATING A READING COURSE

SOME GUIDELINES AND RESULTS

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Evaluation is the collection of information to serve as a guide for teachers making instructional decisions for the ongoing development and implementation of reading courses (Stufflebeam, 1969, 1970; Guba, 1969, 1970; Scriven, 1967; Stake, 1967, 1969). According to Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, evaluation means to "determine or fix the value of." Therefore, what you as a teacher value or what we as a group of individual teachers who are developing and implementing reading courses value will determine to a large extent the program that results. All too often this belief system (what you or we value) is given very little attention. We either pick up a textbook and assign chapters week-by-week without time to consider what our beliefs are, or we use the same instructional approach year after year. We operate by intuition, experience, or armchair decision making (Roser, 1970). However, research has shown that ongoing evaluation is a more useful and rational guide to making instructional decisions (Farr, et al., 1971, 1972).

Because this is true, the first section of this paper deals with six steps that are essential to evaluation or "the act of valuing." The second section provides a basic evaluation design, and the final section includes one brief example of how the described evaluation process was implemented in course development.

Evaluation Questions

To use evaluation as a process of collecting information for making more rational instructional decisions based upon what you value, you need to answer the following six questions

1) What are your beliefs at present about reading and reading instruction? What do you value?

2) What types of instructional decisions do you want to make this year or this semester?

3) What alternatives are open to you?

4) What information needs do you have in regard to your instructional decisions?

5) How and when will you collect the information?

6) How will you use the information?

The answers to these questions will result in an evaluation plan that can be used as a guide for course development. Developing and answering are not easy jobs, but the answers form a continuing basis for developing an instructional program, because evaluation is intertwined with instruction. In short, this type of evaluation is stating beliefs; determining objectives, procedures, materials, and organizational patterns to meet these objectives; collecting data; and systematically modifying an instructional program based on the above. It is cyclical in nature as well as ongoing.

1) <u>What are your beliefs at present about reading and reading instruction? What do you value?</u>

This should be your initial step in developing an evaluation plan. For an individual or a team of individuals to begin developing a basic evaluation design for a course, they must come to terms with values. This may come from sources such as 1) the experience of persons teaching the course; 2) backgrounds and experiences of students -- doctoral, specialist, masters, undergraduates, or children who are involved in the course; 3) lay and professional people within the field (parents, teachers, etc.); 4) expert opinion within departments, cities, colleges, schools, universities; and 5) outside sources including personnel, published literature, and the

most recent research data. What you believe is your guide to action. In this case, what you believe about reading and reading instruction should be seriously discussed initially as well as during the semester or year of course development and implementation. It is the most crucial, and perhaps the most difficult, of the evaluation steps.

2) What types of instructional decisions do you want to make this year or this semester?

These decisions have been labeled instructional objectives which serve as your guide to action through selected procedures, materials, and organizational patterns. In actuality, the above question means: based on your beliefs about reading and reading instruction, what do you want to teach this semester, how, with what materials, and with what organizational patterns. Why? Your objectives should relate directly to your beliefs and must take into consideration your environmental situation, i.e., the faculty who teach with you, your students, your department or school; your school system, college, or university. The goals for preparing teachers of reading should also consider the demands placed on reading teachers. What do teachers of reading do? What do teacher trainers think they need to do? What do teachers think they should know and do to be able to teach reading? Those responsible for teaching reading teachers should constantly study these and similar questions.

3) What alternatives are open to you?

Based on what you value, the environmental situation, and what you want to teach, you must determine the available alternatives for meeting your objectives. These alternatives are controlled by the materials, procedures, and organizational components of the course as well as by the

objectives themselves. The alternatives are really your choices -- the limits of your situation. They limit the full implementation of your objectives just as your belief system limits full accomplishment of your objectives, but that is reality. No one can do more than his values allow or more than he is willing to learn and to modify. The necessities of 1) interrelationships among values, objectives, and alternatives and 2) instructor willingness to search for alternatives in procedures, materials, and organizational patterns which will continuously meet and modify objectives based on values and environmental situations cannot be over emphasized. If an instructor is not open to modification or to search and extension of alternatives, his course remains the same, and he forfeited his goal of continuously improving his instructional program.

4) What information needs do you have in regard to your instructional decisions?

What do you want to know about your objectives and the procedures, materials, and organizational plans to meet them this semester? This step sets the stage for planning evaluation. For example, one question may be how well each student performs under the conditions that you have set up for your instructional program in training teachers of reading.

5) How and when will you collect the information?

As was mentioned initially, evaluation is a continuous process of collecting information to serve as a guide for teachers making instructional decisions for the ongoing development and implementation of reading courses. Evaluation, in proper perspective, is set up as the fifth step in the procedure for developing an evaluation plan. Notice that no decision in regard to how and when to collect information is made before serious

consideration is given to beliefs, objectives, alternatives, and information needs. These set the framework for the development of an evaluation plan which will assist in the development of valid data collection methods that produce information on what should be taught and on the procedures, materials, and organizational patterns to be used during the semester or year.

Evaluation should occur before, initially, during, and after the course is taught. Only in that way can you develop, implement, and modify continuously.

6) How will you use the information?

Use of the information is a thoughtful activity which utilizes the experience and insight of creative instructors. It is based upon beliefs, objectives, procedures, materials, organization, data collection methods, results, and modification of all these as a result of collected information. The most common error in beginning stages of evaluation is making the most obvious decision indicated by the collected information. For example, if students rate a particular activity as poor, the most obvious decision is to drop it. However, instead it may be useful to consider ways to improve the activity, because further data collection might indicate that this is the only possible activity to help students meet a particular objective.

It is very important for an instructor to realize what he does and does not control. An instructor will usually be more effective if students are given some power to control factors which play a part in their learning. Students like to exercise some control, but they also want the course instructor to know what will exist in their learning. It is helpful to have volunteer students from each class participate in planning, implementing,

and evaluating the course.

Planning the Evaluation Design

One example of an evaluation plan (design) based on the six previous questions would look something like the one below.

Basic Decision Making Evaluation Design for Courses

Based on your beliefs (values) in reading and teaching reading.
Based on the environmental situation of which you are a part.

Continual Planning and Structuring Decisions	Alternatives (Choices--Limits)	Information Needs	Data Collection Procedures	Results
What do you want to teach, how, with what materials and what organizational patterns?	What are my choices and limits?	What information do I want to find out?	How and when will I collect information?	What happened? Did it work?
1. Should the objectives for the course be modified this semester?	List and implement objectives.	Expert and student feedback on objectives. Student performance on objectives.	Develop initial, weekly, midsemester and final evaluations on objectives.	Study continuous data on student accomplishment of objectives, procedures, materials, personnel, physical resources, and organizational patterns.
2. Should the procedures to meet the course objectives be modified this semester?	List and implement procedures.	Expert and student feedback on procedures. Student performance on procedures.	Develop initial, weekly, midsemester, and final evaluations on procedures.	
3. Should the materials, personnel, and physical resources to meet the objectives be modified this semester?	List and implement materials, personnel, and physical resources.	Expert and student feedback on materials, personnel, and physical resources. Student performance with all.	Develop initial, weekly, midsemester, and final evaluations on all.	Dependent upon results, terminate, continue, evolve, or drastically modify training experiences.
4. Should organizational patterns to meet the objectives be modified this semester?	List and implement organizational patterns.	Expert and student feedback on organizational patterns. Student performance in organizational patterns.	Develop initial, weekly, midsemester, and final evaluations on organizational patterns.	

A Brief Example of a Course Evaluation

An example of ongoing development, implementation, and decision making based on the concept of evaluation and design presented is given below. It was developed for a Practicum Course in Reading Diagnosis and Correction, Spring, 1972, at Indiana University, The Reading Practicum Center, Institute for Child Study, Bloomington, Indiana. The summary includes a course description (What do you value?); a list of course objectives, procedures, materials, and organizational patterns (What do you want to teach?); alternatives (What alternatives -- choices/limits -- are open to you?); information needs (What information needs do you have?); data collection procedures (How and when will you collect the information?); and results (How will you use the information?).

Course Description: X525 Practicum in Reading

X525 is a course designed primarily for graduate reading students who will be working in elementary and secondary classrooms. Emphasis is placed on 1) diagnostic reading instruction for individual children, 2) a diagnostic reading project for a class of individual children, and 3) strengths and weaknesses of reading methods and materials intended for diagnostic teaching.

There are three major objectives for the course:

1) Plan and carry out appropriate reading instruction for individuals, based on an analysis of each individual's needs.

2) Plan and carry out an appropriate reading project for individuals in a group setting, based on an analysis of each individual's needs.

3) Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of reading methods and materials intended for diagnostic teaching.

The procedures utilized to accomplish these objectives include: 1) providing individual or small group diagnostic reading instruction for three children for two hours per week; preparing written lesson plans for each child tutored; conferring with teachers, parents, and practicum center supervisors; writing three progress reports; 2) participating in the planning and implementation of a reading diagnosis project for a group of individual children; and 3) attending and participating in a weekly one-hour seminar on reading methods and materials intended for diagnostic teaching.

The course is designed to utilize a decision-making process in reading education. The main focus is on identifying decisions (actions or goals to pursue), recognizing alternatives (choices one has), determining information needed to make decisions, building or selecting instruments to gather information on an ongoing basis, and implementation (instruction of the decision).

During the 1972 Spring semester, three Monroe County Community Public Schools and nine classroom teachers (3 per school) volunteered the use of their classrooms to graduate students in X525 for the first joint effort in implementation of the program. The following sites were utilized:

1) University Junior High School
2) Fairview Elementary School
3) Hunter Elementary School
4) The Reading Practicum Center

Approximately five X525 students conducted their programs in each school, with one Practicum Center supervisor and three classroom teachers serving as advisors per school. The graduate students received four hours of credit; teachers had the option of receiving X590 credit for their participation.

A team approach has been implemented to instruct all the Practicum Center courses, of which X525 is one. One faculty member and three graduate assistants have the major responsibility for this particular course. Each member of the team assists by attending or participating in the weekly seminar or by being in charge of a group of graduate students who are providing instruction for individuals and for groups of individual children. Each team member is responsible for the counseling and guidance of his students and for the evaluation of his students' progress toward meeting the three course objectives.

Evaluation

Both formative and summative evaluation programs were implemented for the 1972 Spring semester. Evaluations were utilized weekly to make decisions in regard to changes that needed to be made during the course. Mid-semester and final evaluations of major facets of the course were completed. These evaluations are a continuation of X525 evaluations conducted during the 1970-71 academic year. Evaluation data will be utilized to make decisions in regard to the course objectives, procedures, and content for the summer and fall semester of 1972.

The following decisions were pursued:

During the initial stages of the course, the Reading Center team met and developed the decision matrix shown below to serve as a guide for evaluation.

Decision Matrix

Question (planning and structuring decisions)	Alternatives (choices-limits)	Data Collection (how-when)
1) Were the objectives in X525 met this semester?	Alter, drop, and/or add appropriate course objectives as the course progresses this summer and next fall.	Weekly student evaluation of objectives. Mid-semester and final evaluation
2) Were the procedures developed to meet the objectives appropriate for X525 this semester?	Alter, drop, and/or add appropriate procedures to meet course objectives as the course progresses, this summer, and next fall.	Weekly student evaluation of procedures. Mid-semester and final evaluation of procedures.
3) Was our program in the schools appropriate?	Alter, drop, and/or add appropriate roles and program.	Midsemester and final evaluations of program in the school by principals, classroom teachers, and students.
4) Was the supervision role appropriate?	Alter, drop, and/or add appropriate supervision roles.	Midsemester and final evaluations of the supervision role in the program.

Conclusions

Ongoing evaluation seemed to indicate the following:

I) Were the objectives in X525 met this semester?

The three objectives dealing with 1) individual tutoring, 2) group projects, and 3) strengths and weaknesses of methods and materials for diagnostic teaching which are prevalent in the reading field were met this semester. Improvement needs to be made in implementation of the group project and seminars.

II) Were the activities developed to meet each objective in X525 appropriate? What ways could they be improved?

The activities developed to meet each objective were appropriate (Range=1.33 to 2.72) on a five-point scale. Ways in which each activity could be improved are listed below.

A. Individual Tutoring

1) Give X525 students insight into individual student problems and needs.

2) Combine tutoring in both the public school and the Reading Practicum Center.

3) Have students the same age or grade tutored.

4) Have no more than three students per X525 student.

Conferences with Parents and Teachers

1) Allow parents and teachers to give initial information about the children being tutored.

2) Have supervisor outline issues with which teacher and student could deal.

3) Encourage greater parent involvement.

Lesson Plans

1) Provide several alternative formats from which to select style.

2) Individualize plans for each X525 student.

3) Give X525 students feedback on lesson plans prior to their tutoring.

Final Report

1) Individualize reports for each X525 student.

2) Have alternative formats from which to choose.

3) Have clear explanations by the X525 supervisors.

B. Group Project

1) Have clearly defined purposes.

2) Have the project cooperatively planned with the classroom teacher and the X525 student.

3) Receive help with this assignment from the classroom teacher and the supervisor.

C. Seminars

1) Solicit X525 students' topics of interest in teaching and in reading.

2) Provide question/answer sessions on topics of interest to X525 students.

3) Provide seminars on materials available.

4) Deal with topics of interest in small-group settings.

5) Provide seminars on methods of tutoring.

6) Require less frequent evaluations.

Materials Day

1) Announce this requirement at the first of the semester.

2) Continue with better organization and planning.

III. Was our program in the schools appropriate?

Classroom Teachers

Yes, the program in the schools was appropriate. The teachers would like to see the program continue in the schools with the same activities: 1) individual tutoring, 2) group projects, and 3) seminars and materials day. Teachers would like to continue to have the option of X590 credit.

X525 Students

Working with the public schools would be a more effective learning experience if:

1) The Reading Practicum Center role was described.

2) Teaching goals for a child could be blended with the teaching goals of the classroom teacher for the same child.

3) A student's role in relation to the classroom teacher was defined more clearly.

Working in the Reading Practicum center would be made a more effective learning experience if:

1) Tutoring could be part time in an X525 student's own classroom setting rather than in one large room.

2) Increased contact with reality could be made.

IV. Was the supervision role appropriate?

Mid semester and final evaluations were conducted to determine how effectively the X525 supervisors were interacting in the supervising teacher role. The supervisors cooperatively defined the teaching/learning process and the supervising role. These definitions are given below:

1) Teaching/learning process -- a deliberate attempt to bring about changes in behavior (not necessarily due to maturation).

2) Teacher -- an effective teacher is primarily a decision maker who chooses among many alternatives. Therefore he/she is a thoughtful, goal-oriented person who is concerned with developing thinking in each student. Hence the effective teacher becomes a facilitator of the learner's environment by deliberately providing him with purposeful, meaningful opportunities which help him become a rational individual.

3) Supervising role -- concerns itself especially with human interaction as it affects the growth and development of teachers by implementing the teaching/learning process for effective learning to take place. It also involves guiding the teacher by enlightening and strengthening his knowledge, recognizing expertise to be a vital influence in the teaching/learning process.

These definitions were used as a philosophical framework for supervisory implementation during the semester. Evaluations were also developed in light of the definitions.

Yes, the supervision role was appropriate. Supervisory behaviors which may guide the X525 students to become effective decision makers and reading teachers, as well as the supervisory behaviors students seemed to need are given below:

A. Supervisory behaviors that seem to be needed by X525 students:

1) Willingness to listen to an X525 student's point of view and ability to understand it.

2) Respect for an X525 student both professionally and personally.

3) Use of positive and encouraging evaluations.

4) Provision for support of an X525 student's endeavors.

5) Ability to put a student at ease during conferences.

6) Provision for commendation of an X525 student's work at appropriate times.

7) Ability to offer constructive criticism about specific tutoring situations.

8) Reflection of a positive attitude.

9) Provision for a student to approach the tutoring situations in his/her own manner.

10) Use of tact in getting points across.

11) Ability to encourage a student to try other procedures if ones have failed.

12) Provision for an opportunity to talk with an X525 student.

13) Ability to see one's role as more than just a supervisor.

B. For developing more effective decision makers among the X525 students, a supervising teacher in X525 could:

1) Encourage students to be creative and individualistic.

2) Allow for independence but always be available to:

a) Listen

b) Suggest or help select alternative procedures if X525 students want and/or need them.

3) Evaluate lesson plans and make verbal or written suggestions about them after the tutoring sessions.

4) Have frequent conferences to make decisions in a team situation.

5) Not require conference attendance.

6) Work with X525 students on an individual basis.

7) Observe individual's teaching sessions.

8) Allow and encourage each student to develop his/her own philosophy of reading.

C. For increasing an X525 student's teaching expertise in reading, a supervising teacher in X525 could:

1) Get to know his/her X525 students.

2) Be flexible in his/her own ideas about teaching and about reading.

3) Get to know the children an X525 student tutors.

4) Discuss practical problems about the tutoring sessions after observing and present new ideas as well as directions to sources of materials.

5) Be well organized in his/her own teaching and ideas on reading.

6) Question himself/herself in relation to the teaching/learning process.

7) Help an X525 student become a keen observer of children.

8) Use questioning techniques with X525 students that cause them to evaluate their thinking.

9) Provide adequate group and individual conference time weekly.

10) Offer a constructive evaluation immediately after the tutoring session.

What Decisions Were Made?

During the Course - Modification in course content and procedures occurred throughout the semester as a result of weekly seminar evaluations and a mid semester evaluation. Each Monday the Center team reviewed the previous week's evaluation and modified accordingly.

For Summer and Fall, 1972 - After the final evaluation of the course, the Center team met to discuss the summer and fall semesters and the changes

that would be made. The following list of modifications, based directly on the evaluations, was made by the team for the summer and fall semesters, 1972.

Course Objectives

The same course objectives would be used.

Course Activities

1) Individual Tutoring

a) Try to give students more insight into their children.
b) Keep the same number of children to tutor.
c) Combine tutoring in both the public school and the Reading Practicum Center.

Conferences with Parents and Teachers

a) Allow parents and teachers to give X525 students initial information about their children.
b) Encourage greater parent involvement.
c) Have supervisor outline issues with which teacher and student might deal.

Lesson Plans

a) Provide alternative formats.
b) Individualize plans for each X525 student.
c) Have supervisors give feedback prior to and after tutoring.

Final Report

a) Individualize reports for each X525 student.
b) Have alternate formats from which to choose.
c) Provide clearer explanation.
d) Decide whether the report should be written or verbal.

2) Group Project

a) Have clearly defined purposes.
b) Have the project planned and implemented cooperatively with the classroom teacher and the X525 students.

3) Seminars

a) Solicit X525 students' topics of interest in teaching and in reading.

b) Provide question/answer sessions on topics of interest.
c) Provide seminars on methods and materials.
d) Have some seminars in small group settings.
e) Require less evaluation.

Materials Day

a) Continue, but announce at the first of the semester.
b) Provide better organization and planning.

4) Supervision

Implement behaviors which students seem to need to become more effective decision makers, reading teachers. These are listed on pages 14, 15, and 16.

Process of Evaluation

Continue the utilization of formative and summative evaluation. Work toward beginning to determine specific behaviors which may make a difference in the effectiveness of a reading teacher.

Team Concept

Continue working as a team.

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